



WhistlerIrrigation
Services, LTD.

The Complete Consumers Guide To Choosing An Irrigation Contractor.

This educational service is provided by Paul Hauschka, owner of Whistler Irrigation Services Ltd.

I've been in the irrigation contracting business for over twenty four years. In that time, I've observed that the selection of an irrigation contractor can be the subject of much consumer confusion.

In fact, there are many misconceptions about irrigation contractors. I decided to offer this consumer guide so that when **you** select an irrigation contractor, an informed intelligent decision can be made resulting in choosing an experienced professional who will provide reliable efficient solutions. You deserve the best service and value for your money. Do not accept less. Following are :-

The 4 Most Common Misconceptions

The 10 Must Know Tips

Financial decisions have an element of risk associated with them and you need a way to properly judge a potential contractor, his product offering, and mitigate that risk. Price is seldom a reliable indicator, particularly when your knowledge of the potential finished product is uncertain. How do you know what to look for? Who can you trust? Here are some common misconceptions.

Misconception # 1: We are IIABC Certified.

Certified in what? The Irrigation Industry Association of B.C. encourages education streams (see Link to IIABC Certification Program) <http://www.irrigationbc.com/page/certification-program> and certifies members and others in a variety of disciplines. These range from a CT level 1 which is a basic introduction to irrigation practices for individuals to the very challenging Certified Irrigation Contractor Turf Commercial (of which there are only 9 in B.C.). Big difference, and you can see how this can be misleading. You can easily check the status of your candidates at (see Link to IIABC Certified Professionals) <http://www.irrigationbc.com/irrigation/certifications/search/>

Misconception # 2: An electrical ticket is not needed for work on irrigation low voltage valve or sensor wiring, or controller power supplies.

The B.C. Safety Authority conducts an exam to verify, when successfully passed, the competence of any person who performs work as described above. Requirements to qualify to take such exam include an approved 24 to 30 hour Electrical Code Book Course and 1800 hours or one year of suitable work experience under a Certified Field Safety Representative, Class LO, Low Energy Systems. The FSR must in turn be, or be employed by, a Licensed Electrical Contractor who has posted a bond with the Safety Authority. A permit is required for each project. The Safety Authority conducts public education and enforcement programs due to the hazard potential of inadequate work. Why would **you** take any risk.

Misconception # 3: The Contractor with the lowest price will be the best choice.

We all know intuitively that this is false and the brain surgery analogy comes to mind. But the thought is attractive and something for nothing drives much marketing. How can **you** determine, in advance, if a proposal :-

- matches precipitation rates of sprinklers operating at the same time
- is suitably cost effective, vandal resistant, and durable equipment is used
- are sun angles, microclimates considered
- is the design hydraulically sound and will operate properly with no water hammer
- is the controller outside for service access and weatherproof
- will the installation practices lead to costly future maintenance issues
- will there be coverage next year when plants grow
- what is included and are they licensed for such work such as an inside water connection or installation and testing of the required backflow device, consider your insurance
- will the service and warranty commitment be reliable

An IIABC Certified Designer's technical skill and integrity is recognized by granting them a "Seal" which they are entitled to affix to designs and accompanying specifications which meet IIABC Standards for Landscape Irrigation Systems <http://goo.gl/RDoyz>. Rather than you investigating and guessing at technical matters for which, at best, you can only apply your common sense why not ask for the proposal to be "Sealed" by the

contractor's designer or someone from the web site list <http://www.irrigationbc.com/irrigation/certifications/search/> if he has nobody suitable on his staff. The entire purpose of these certifications is to protect the public from shoddy work and unscrupulous contractors. It only makes sense for **you** to take advantage of such resources.

Misconception # 4 : All irrigation service providers are pretty much the same.

What's the big deal. Fix what's broken. As with most things, you get what you pay for. I'll tell you how my company services our clients and let you be the judge. In the spring, we provide all of our customers with a written quote for the season's service. Our mission is to provide our clients with a complete no hassle no worries experience by taking care of absolutely everything. Each property is assigned to a service technician who provides the owner with a direct cell phone number for any questions or concerns they may have. We arrange our own access to turn the water supply on in the spring, test all the zones, and make any necessary repairs. We manage and maintain the system all summer long, turning the controller up and down as the weather dictates. We make contact with any landscapers so that their activities or concerns are considered. The controller is checked regularly as other maintenance activity, power surges, and even minor electrical storms easily trip ground fault breakers. Areas are tested if stress, washouts or any other evidence suggests something is wrong. We also organize, on our own, without reminders, to test and report on the backflow device, shut the system down when appropriate, and blow the water out for winter. In short, we take complete responsibility for the irrigation system as if it was our own. This level of service is reliable and remarkably inexpensive as with 1200 customers in Whistler, each service technician has a small geographic area in which he is always located, doing similar things for all his customers. Not all service is the same.

Call me personally if you are not being treated like you deserve to be. (604-698-1700)

The 10 Must-Know Tips for choosing an Irrigation Contractor

1. Are they an Irrigation Industry Certified Contractor?

This is the most important and easiest qualification to check. Becoming a Certified Irrigation Contractor is no easy feat and a pretty good indication that the recipients are knowledgeable and credible. Check out the IIABC website before you consider hiring anyone <https://www.irrigationbc.com/page/certified-irrigation-contractor> This program was designed to protect the consumer from unqualified contractors and provides a quick and easy screening process. Many companies advertise that they are IIABC Certified and it's possible they are certified in something (see misconception # 1), but they are not

Certified Contractors unless they are listed in the above website. Don't even think about hiring an uncertified contractor. Why would you take a chance?

2. Does each service technician carry a complete inventory?

There is nothing more wasteful than a contractor arriving on site to repair your system without the correct parts. Check to ensure they have the necessary inventory for your specific system and do not substitute. Do not risk compromising the integrity of your system with substandard or incorrect parts.

3. Do they have an adequate number of qualified service technicians?

When it comes to irrigation, qualifications and experience count. A skilled technician can quickly and efficiently diagnose a variety of problems, and will spend less time on site saving you money. Make sure your contractor has a sufficient number of skilled technicians so their service is available immediately when needed, and you are not left with trying to explain what is wrong remotely, well after the fact.

4. Is the company a Rain Bird Select Contractor?

Rain Bird Select Contractors are an exclusive group, chosen for their demonstrated commitment to the industry's highest standards of quality and integrity. These contractors are at the top of the industry and are the only ones able to offer an extended 3-5 year Rain Bird product warranty.

5. Does each service technician carry a computerized customer database

A computerized database, complete with detailed system descriptions and sketches is an invaluable asset to ensure time spent on site is as efficient as possible. It takes effort and commitment to accumulate all the data of a particular property, but can save so much time and money when used as an extra resource during system diagnostics. Ever looked for a mulch covered valve box without knowing where it should be.

6. Does the company have a proven track record?

Is the company well known in the community? What's the word of mouth from previous customers? Are they and their staff suitably licensed and insured? Will they still be in business 3 years from now to stand behind the warranty of their work? Certainly they are

nice people and have to start somewhere, but does the evidence suggest you will be part of their learning experience. Why take the risk?

7. Is the company staff aware of and certified to test your backflow equipment?

Properly operating backflow devices are essential to protecting the potable water supply from contamination. A Cross Connection Control tester certification is required to assess and ensure compliance with Provincial safety regulations, and to complete the mandatory annual compliance test and report to the RMOW. Consider your position if this is neglected.

8. Are they a licensed bonded electrical contractor with ticketed technicians

Refer to misconception # 2 for an outline of the requirements in this area. Think of the consequences of a problem with unpermitted or unauthorized work. What is the benefit to you for taking such a risk. If a contractor is not suitably qualified, you should require him to retain an electrical contractor to supervise that aspect of the work and guide the permit process.

9. Does the contractor have the financial ability to warranty their work

It is essential to ensure your contractor can financially stand behind his work. Otherwise any warranty or guarantee is just an empty promise. In a catastrophic event like a flood, frozen system or failed water connection, a company that does not have significant financial assets and appropriate insurance is just another liability.

10. Are they a local company?

Many companies advertise and work in Whistler but there is only one company resident here. Prompt service and immediate response in an emergency is only possible if the contractor is local with staff in the community.

If you have reached this point in my “Guide” I hope you now have the resources and information you need to make an informed decision for your needs, whether new installation or service for an existing system.

I’ll be happy to answer any further questions and / or provide you with a free consultation or written project or service proposal, without obligation of any kind. I will also be

happy, if you are not in the Whistler area, to provide advice and to supplement or explain information on the IIABC web site. To reach me call 604-698-1700. Thank you and please visit our website at www.whistlerirrigation.com if you have not already done so.

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